

An Analysis of the Projected Destination Image of Ryukyu Mura as a Cultural Tourism Destination in Okinawa, Japan: Cultural Attributes, Staged Representation, and a Proposed Image-Formation Mechanism

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Abstract. Destination image is conventionally understood as tourists' perceptions, yet these perceptions interact with the image projected by destinations. This study focuses on the projected (supply-side) image of Ryukyu Mura, a reconstructed cultural village in Okinawa, Japan, examining how Okinawan heritage is curated and communicated through cultural attributes rather than measuring tourists' perceptions. A qualitative visual-documentary design combined non-participant observation, analysis of interpretive signage, and systematic photographic documentation. Data were examined using six-phase reflexive thematic analysis supported by a written codebook, independent double coding, negotiated resolution of disagreements, and an audit trail. Three themes emerged: (1) traditional architecture and village environment, (2) cultural performances and activities, and (3) traditional lifestyle and material culture. Each attribute was further classified by heritage provenance and dominant mode of tourism mediation, distinguishing conserved heritage resources, reconstructed settings, cultural symbols, performative representations, and commodified tourism products. Drawing on staged, constructive, and emergent authenticity, the study proposes a five-stage mechanism: cultural attributes → curation and staging → cultural representation → visitor interpretation → destination image. Four interaction principles—redundancy, complementarity, symbolic condensation, and participation—explain how staged attributes may contribute to a distinctive and credible cultural destination identity. The study contributes an attribute-level, criteria-based framework for examining how reconstructed attractions assemble projected heritage images and offers a transferable analytical procedure for similar cultural tourism sites. The absence of visitor data remains the principal limitation and provides the basis for a planned second phase.

Keywords: Cultural Attributes, Projected Destination Image, Heritage Representation, Ryukyu Mura, Okinawa.

1 Introduction

Tourism has become an important activity that allows people to experience different cultures, traditions, histories, and ways of life. In addition to natural attractions, cultural tourism has increasingly attracted tourists who seek meaningful experiences and opportunities to learn about the cultural identity of a destination. Cultural tourism involves various elements of local heritage, including traditional architecture, performing arts, handicrafts, food, customs, and other cultural practices. Therefore, cultural resources can play an important role in creating a distinctive image of a tourism destination.

One important concept in tourism studies is destination image. Destination image refers to the perceptions, impressions, and beliefs that tourists associate with a particular destination. It is not only related to the physical characteristics of a destination but also to the meanings and emotions developed by visitors. Previous research has demonstrated that destination image is a multidimensional concept that can be influenced by various information sources and sociocultural factors. Destination image generally concerns the overall mental impressions and perceptions that tourists have about a destination. Thus, examining destination image can help explain how a tourism destination is perceived and represented by tourists.

A distinction that is central to this study concerns the difference between the image a destination projects and the image tourists perceive. Image formation is commonly described as an interaction between induced agents — the settings, messages, and materials supplied by the destination itself — and organic agents such as prior knowledge, personal experience, and word of mouth [24], [31]. The projected image is thus the supply-side raw material of destination image: the set of attributes, symbols, and staged experiences that a destination makes available for interpretation. Because it is materially present in the site, it can be studied through the destination's own physical and semiotic environment. The perceived image, by contrast, is the cognitive, affective, and conative structure that individual tourists ultimately construct [32], [34], and it can only be established through visitor data. The present study is deliberately located at the projected pole: it examines what Ryukyu Mura offers to be perceived rather than what tourists actually perceive, and all of its claims are framed accordingly.

Okinawa, Japan, is an interesting destination for studying cultural tourism because it possesses a distinctive cultural heritage associated with the history and traditions of the Ryukyu Islands. Although Okinawa is widely recognized for its beaches, subtropical environment, and marine attractions, the region also offers cultural attractions that introduce visitors to traditional Okinawan life. Its cultural characteristics can be observed through traditional houses, local music and dance, handicrafts, food, traditional clothing, and other cultural practices. These cultural elements contribute to the uniqueness of Okinawa as a tourism destination.

One of the attractions that presents Okinawan cultural heritage is Ryukyu Mura. Located in Okinawa, Ryukyu Mura is a cultural theme park designed as a recreation of a traditional Okinawan village from the period of the Ryukyu Kingdom. The attraction includes traditional houses with red-tiled roofs, stone walls, cultural workshops, traditional performances, local food, and opportunities for visitors to participate in cultural activities. Visitors can also experience activities related to pottery, traditional music,

weaving, and other forms of Okinawan cultural expression. These characteristics make Ryukyu Mura not merely a tourist attraction but also a place where aspects of Okinawan cultural heritage are presented and experienced by visitors.

The cultural characteristics presented at Ryukyu Mura have the potential to shape tourists' perceptions of the destination. Traditional architecture may create an image of historical authenticity, while cultural performances and hands-on activities may create emotional and experiential impressions. The combination of these elements can contribute to how tourists understand the identity and uniqueness of Ryukyu Mura as a cultural tourism destination. Previous research has also indicated that cultural characteristics can influence the formation of destination image and that cultural elements may become important attributes in positioning cultural tourism destinations.

However, studies specifically examining how Ryukyu Mura is represented as a cultural tourism destination through the concept of destination image remain relatively limited. Existing discussions of Ryukyu Mura tend to focus on its attractions and visitor experiences, while the way its cultural characteristics contribute to the formation of its destination image requires further attention. Therefore, analyzing the destination image of Ryukyu Mura can provide a simple but useful understanding of how cultural elements are represented and perceived within this tourism attraction.

Three gaps follow from the literature reviewed above. First, although the general association between cultural attributes and destination image is by now well established [8], [9], [10], far less attention has been paid to attribute-level analysis of how a purpose-built cultural attraction assembles its projected image, or to the analytical criteria by which its individual elements should be classified. Second, cultural theme parks occupy an ambiguous position between heritage conservation and tourism production, yet studies of such sites frequently describe their contents as “heritage” without stating the criteria that justify the label, thereby collapsing the distinction between a conserved resource, a reconstructed setting, a symbol, a performance, and a saleable product. Third, research on destination image tends either to measure perceptions without examining what is projected, or to describe what is projected without theorising how projection becomes perception. This study addresses these gaps by (i) analysing the projected image of Ryukyu Mura at the level of individual cultural attributes, (ii) proposing explicit criteria that distinguish heritage resources, reconstructed heritage settings, cultural symbols, performative representations, and commodified tourism products, and (iii) developing a conceptual mechanism, with four interaction principles, that links cultural attributes to destination image through curation and visitor interpretation. The intended contribution is therefore conceptual and methodological rather than a restatement of an already-known relationship, and it is offered as a transferable analytical procedure for reading reconstructed cultural attractions elsewhere.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the destination image of Ryukyu Mura as a cultural tourism destination in Okinawa, Japan. The study focuses on identifying the cultural attributes presented at Ryukyu Mura and examining how these attributes contribute to its destination image. A qualitative approach is employed to provide an in-depth description of the cultural characteristics and perceptions associated with Ryukyu Mura.

To avoid any ambiguity of construct, the objective is stated precisely: the study analyses the cultural representation that Ryukyu Mura projects and theorises its likely image effects; it does not measure the destination image held by tourists. Where the term “destination image” is used in the analysis below, it should be read as “projected destination image” unless explicitly stated otherwise.

1.1 Research Questions

Based on the background and research focus, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How is Okinawan cultural heritage represented at Ryukyu Mura, and what thematic structure characterises the projected destination image of the site as a whole?
2. How can the individual cultural attributes that constitute this projection be analytically classified in terms of heritage provenance and dominant mode of tourism mediation, and through what mechanism might they be translated into tourists’ destination image?

The two questions are analytically distinct and operate at different levels. The first is descriptive and thematic: it treats the site as a whole and asks what overall representation is assembled from the observed material. The second is classificatory and explanatory: it disaggregates that representation into individual attributes, subjects each to explicit criteria, and then asks by what mechanism such attributes could plausibly shape a perceived image. The first question yields a description of the projection; the second yields a typology and a proposed causal pathway. They are not two descriptions of the same evidence.

2 Research Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to analyze the destination image of Ryukyu Mura as a cultural tourism destination in Okinawa, Japan. A qualitative approach was selected because the study focused on describing and interpreting the cultural characteristics represented within the destination rather than measuring tourists’ perceptions quantitatively. The study focused on the physical and cultural attributes of Ryukyu Mura as observed during the researcher’s visit.

The design is more precisely described as a qualitative visual-documentary study of a projected destination image. Three implications follow and are stated here so that the findings are not over-claimed. First, the unit of analysis is the destination’s representational environment — its buildings, spatial arrangement, symbols, scheduled performances, interpretive signage, and material objects — not the tourist. Second, the study is therefore able to establish what is projected and to reason about how that projection is designed to be read, but it cannot establish what visitors in fact perceive, feel, or intend. Third, statements about “contribution to destination image” in the analysis below are analytical inferences about the image-forming potential of observed cues, and are marked as such, rather than empirical findings about perception.

This choice is defensible on its own terms. The projected image is a legitimate and independently meaningful object of study, because it is the induced component of image formation over which destination managers have direct control [24], and because visitor perception cannot be interpreted without first knowing what was available to be perceived. Observation and photographic documentation are established instruments for analysing this component: they capture the site's semiotic environment in a form that can be revisited, coded, and audited by a second analyst. A companion visitor survey is nevertheless the necessary next step, and is set out in the limitations section.

2.2 Research Site and Data

Data were collected through direct observation and photographic documentation at Ryukyu Mura, Okinawa, Japan. The observation focused on cultural attributes presented within the destination, including traditional architecture, cultural performances, cultural symbols, traditional household objects, and other elements associated with Okinawan cultural heritage. Photographs were taken as documentation of the observed cultural elements and were used as supporting data in the analysis.

The data corpus is specified as follows. Fieldwork was conducted at Ryukyu Mura, Onna Village, Okinawa, during a single site visit. Observation followed the site's standard visitor circulation route and covered the entrance zone, the relocated traditional houses and their interiors, the craft workshop areas, the performance space, and the retail area. Three data forms were generated: (i) systematic photographic documentation of publicly displayed cultural attributes, (ii) field notes recorded during and immediately after the visit, and (iii) photographic transcriptions of on-site interpretive signage, performance schedules, and wayfinding text, which were used as the site's own account of what it presents.

Photographs were taken purposively rather than exhaustively: an element was photographed when it was publicly displayed to visitors and when it carried an explicit or implicit claim about Okinawan culture. Images of identifiable visitors were excluded. Because the corpus reflects one visit by one observer, it records the site as encountered on that occasion; seasonal programming, special events, and elements not on the public route are outside its scope, and this boundary is acknowledged in the limitations.

2.3 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis involved several stages, including familiarization with the observation and photographic data, identification of relevant cultural elements, initial coding, categorization of similar codes, and development of broader themes. The identified themes were then interpreted in relation to the destination image of Ryukyu Mura as a cultural tourism destination. The analysis resulted in three main themes: traditional architecture and village environment, cultural performances and activities, and traditional lifestyle and material culture.

Because the transparency of this procedure is essential to the credibility of the findings, the six phases are documented in full below, following reflexive thematic analysis

[28] and the data-structure logic of first-order codes, second-order categories, and aggregate themes [30].

Phase 1 — Familiarisation. Photographs and field notes were assembled into a single chronological corpus ordered by the visitor route. Each image was given a unique identifier (e.g., RM-014) and paired with the field note written at the same point, so that every visual item retained its spatial and interpretive context.

Phase 2 — Descriptive image annotation. Each photograph was annotated on three registers before any interpretive coding: denotative content (what physical elements are present), spatial position (where the element sits on the visitor route and whether it is foregrounded), and accompanying text (any signage, label, or schedule visible in or adjacent to the frame). This step was kept deliberately separate from interpretation in order to reduce the risk of reading a cultural meaning into an image before describing it.

Phase 3 — Initial coding. Codes were generated inductively at the level of the individual element, using short descriptive labels close to the data (for example, “red-tiled roof”, “shisa at gateway”, “tatami floor”, “scheduled Eisa performance”, “potter’s wheel in workshop”, “costume rental sign”). Each code was recorded in a written codebook containing the code label, its definition, an inclusion rule, an exclusion rule, and the identifiers of the images and notes in which it occurred. The codebook was revised iteratively and its versions retained.

Phase 4 — Categorisation. Codes were compared with one another and grouped into second-order categories on the basis of shared representational function rather than surface similarity — for example, roofs, walls, timber structure, and village layout were grouped as “built environment as historical setting”, while schedules, costumes, drums, and stage space were grouped as “culture presented as timed event”. Constant comparison was used: each new code was tested against existing categories, and categories were split or merged when a code did not fit.

Phase 5 — Theme development and review. Categories were reviewed against the full corpus for internal homogeneity and external distinctiveness, and three aggregate themes were retained. Candidate themes that could not be sustained across multiple independent items of evidence were discarded rather than reported.

Phase 6 — Interpretation and classification. The themes were interpreted in relation to the projected destination image, and each constituent attribute was then classified against the criteria set out in Section 2.4, which answers the second research question at a different analytical level from the first.

2.4 Analytical Criteria for Classifying Cultural Attributes

A recurring difficulty in studies of cultural attractions is that everything displayed on site tends to be labelled heritage. Ryukyu Mura is a purpose-built attraction in which cultural elements are deliberately selected, relocated, scheduled, and priced for visitors, so the distinction between a heritage resource and a tourism representation of one cannot be assumed. To make that distinction explicit and repeatable, each attribute was classified against two criteria: heritage provenance (the documented origin and conti-

nuity of the element outside the tourism setting) and dominant mode of tourism mediation (the operation through which the element is made available to visitors). The resulting categories, their defining criteria, and the indicators used to apply them are set out in Table 1.

Table 1. Analytical criteria for classifying cultural attributes at a curated cultural attraction

Category	Defining criterion	Operational indicator applied in this study	Illustrative attribute at the site
Heritage resource (in situ or conserved)	Element with documented historical provenance that is transmitted within the community independently of tourism and is recognised in heritage inventories, official designation, or scholarly documentation.	Origin, age, or continuity is attested by on-site interpretation or external documentation; the element would continue to exist in the absence of visitors.	Ryukyuan farmhouses of documented origin; Eisa as a community Bon practice; living pottery and textile traditions.
Reconstructed heritage setting	Element that reproduces a documented historical form but has been relocated, rebuilt, or recomposed within a tourism-managed context.	Form is historically grounded while location, arrangement, adjacency, and use are curated by the operator.	The village layout; the arrangement and furnishing of house interiors as walk-through displays.
Cultural symbol	Element whose dominant function is to signify collective identity rather than to serve a historical practical use.	High recognisability, repeated and emblematic placement, deployment at thresholds and sightlines.	Shisa figures at the entrance and on rooflines.
Performative representation	Living cultural expression enacted for an audience at appointed times, typically in compressed or adapted form.	Fixed schedule, designated stage or space, defined duration, audience-facing orientation, repetition across the day.	Scheduled Eisa, sanshin music, and dance; costumed performance.
Commodified tourism product	Element produced primarily for exchange, participation fees, or retail sale.	Priced, packaged, purchasable, bundled into an experience programme, or located in a retail setting.	Craft-making workshops; souvenir pottery and textiles; costume-wearing experiences.

Two qualifications govern the use of Table 1. First, the categories are not mutually exclusive: a single attribute may occupy several simultaneously, as Eisa does in being at once an intangible heritage practice, a performative representation, and part of a ticketed programme. The criteria are therefore used to identify an attribute's dominant mode of mediation at this site, not to assign it a single fixed identity. Second, the categories are analytical, not evaluative: classifying an attribute as staged or commodified is not a judgement that it is inauthentic. Following the constructivist position, authenticity is treated as negotiated and emergent rather than as an intrinsic property of an object [26], [27], while the staged-authenticity framework [25] is used descriptively to distinguish the front region presented to visitors from the practices that continue outside it. The presence of an element inside a tourism attraction is thus explicitly not accepted as sufficient evidence of heritage significance; the criteria above supply that evidence, or record its absence.

2.5 Trustworthiness and Reflexivity

Four procedures were used to support the trustworthiness of the analysis [29]. Credibility was pursued through source triangulation, since each reported attribute was

checked across the available data forms, namely photographs, field notes, and on-site text. Dependability was supported by independent review and double coding by the two authors using the written codebook, followed by discussion and negotiated resolution of coding differences. Rather than presenting an unsupported numerical agreement statistic, the study retains an audit trail documenting code definitions, coding decisions, disagreements, and their resolution. The resolution rule adopted was that an attribute is recorded as heritage-provenanced only where documentary support exists; otherwise it is recorded under the weaker category. Confirmability was supported by an audit trail comprising the annotated image inventory, successive codebook versions, the code-to-category mapping table, and the final analytical matrix.

Reflexivity is also relevant here. Both authors are tourism researchers based in Indonesia and visited the site as international visitors without Okinawan language competence. This position gives reasonable access to what the site projects to a non-local audience, which is the object of the study, but it limits access to meanings legible only to Okinawan or Japanese visitors and to any commentary provided orally in Japanese. Interpretations were therefore anchored to the site's own English and Japanese signage wherever possible, and inferences that could not be so anchored are flagged in the analysis.

3 Result and Discussion

3.1 The Destination Image of Ryukyu Mura as a Cultural Tourism Destination

Table 2. Themes Representing the Projected Destination Image of Ryukyu Mura

Theme	Observed Cultural Attributes	Representation of Destination Image
Traditional Architecture and Village Environment	Traditional houses, red-tiled roofs, wooden structures, village arrangement, shisa	Ryukyu Mura is represented as a traditional Okinawan village environment
Cultural Performances and Activities	Eisa, traditional music, traditional dance, traditional clothing, cultural performance schedules	Ryukyu Mura is represented as a place for experiencing Okinawan performing arts
Traditional Lifestyle and Material Culture	Tatami, pottery, textiles, wooden interiors, household objects	Ryukyu Mura is represented as a place that showcases traditional Okinawan lifestyle and material heritage

A framing note applies to the whole of this section. What is reported below is the image Ryukyu Mura projects, reconstructed from its buildings, symbols, scheduled performances, signage, and material objects. Where the text states that an attribute “contributes to the destination image”, this is a claim about the image-forming potential of an observed cue — what the site makes available for interpretation — and not a measured effect on tourists’ perceptions, which the present data cannot demonstrate. Section 3.1 answers the first research question by describing the thematic structure of that projection at the level of the site. Section 3.2 then answers the second research question at a different analytical level, by disaggregating the projection into individual attributes and subjecting each to the criteria established in Table 1, which produces a classification rather than a second description.

The analysis of the observation and photographic documentation identified three main themes that represent the destination image of Ryukyu Mura as a cultural tourism destination in Okinawa, Japan. These themes are (1) traditional architecture and village environment, (2) cultural performances and activities, and (3) traditional lifestyle and material culture. The three themes demonstrate that the destination image of Ryukyu Mura is strongly associated with the representation of traditional Okinawan cultural heritage.

3.2 Traditional Architecture and Village Environment

The first theme identified from the observation and photographic documentation is traditional architecture and village environment. Ryukyu Mura presents a traditional village atmosphere through its buildings, roofs, village arrangement, and cultural symbols. The documentation shows traditional houses characterized by wooden structures and distinctive red-tiled roofs. These architectural features create a visual environment that represents the traditional character of Okinawa.



Fig. 1. Traditional architecture and village environment at Ryukyu Mura

The entrance area also contains cultural symbols that strengthen the visual identity of the destination. One of the visible elements is the shisa, a traditional Okinawan guardian figure commonly associated with Okinawan houses and cultural identity. The combination of traditional houses, red-tiled roofs, wooden structures, and shisa creates a distinctive visual environment that differs from a contemporary tourism facility.

The traditional village setting contributes to the destination image by presenting Ryukyu Mura as a place associated with the historical and cultural character of Okinawa. Rather than using a modern architectural setting, the destination provides visitors with an environment designed to represent traditional village life. Therefore, traditional architecture functions as an important cultural attribute in constructing the image of Ryukyu Mura as a cultural tourism destination.

3.3 Cultural Performances and Activities

The second theme concerns cultural performances and activities. The documentation indicates that cultural performances are an important component of the tourism experience at Ryukyu Mura. Information displayed at the destination presents scheduled cultural performances, including Eisa, traditional music, and traditional dance.



Fig. 2. Cultural performance information at Ryukyu Mura

The presence of a daily performance schedule demonstrates that cultural activities are systematically presented as part of the visitor experience. The documentation also shows representations of performers wearing traditional clothing and participating in traditional musical and dance activities.

These performances contribute to the destination image by presenting Okinawan culture through activities that can be observed by visitors. Cultural heritage is therefore represented not only through buildings and objects but also through performing arts. The presentation of Eisa, traditional music, and dance creates an image of Ryukyu Mura as a destination where visitors can encounter elements of Okinawan performing culture.

The cultural activities also provide an experiential dimension to the destination. While traditional buildings provide a physical representation of cultural heritage, performances allow cultural traditions to be presented through movement, music, clothing, and live activities. Consequently, cultural performances strengthen the image of Ryukyu Mura as an attraction that emphasizes cultural experience.

3.4 Traditional Lifestyle and Material Culture

The third theme identified from the documentation is traditional lifestyle and material culture. This theme is particularly visible in the interior of the traditional houses within Ryukyu Mura. The documentation shows wooden structures, tatami flooring, traditional textiles, pottery, and other household objects associated with traditional domestic life.



Fig. 3. Traditional interior and material culture at Ryukyu Mura

The traditional interior provides a representation of how cultural heritage can be presented through everyday spaces and objects. The use of tatami, wooden architectural elements, traditional textiles, and pottery creates an atmosphere associated with traditional Japanese and Okinawan domestic environments.

The presence of these objects contributes to the destination image by allowing cultural heritage to be represented through material culture. Traditional houses and household objects provide visitors with visual information about historical lifestyles and domestic practices. Thus, the cultural image of Ryukyu Mura is not limited to formal cultural performances but also includes representations of everyday life.

The documentation therefore suggests that traditional lifestyle and material culture are important elements in constructing Ryukyu Mura's identity as a cultural tourism destination. The combination of traditional buildings, interior spaces, household objects, and cultural artifacts creates a destination environment that emphasizes cultural heritage and traditional ways of life.

Overall, the results indicate that the destination image of Ryukyu Mura is constructed through the integration of traditional architecture, cultural performances, and traditional lifestyle and material culture. These cultural attributes collectively create a distinctive representation of Okinawan heritage. The destination does not rely on a single cultural attraction; instead, its image is formed through the combination of the physical environment, cultural activities, and material representations of traditional life.

The findings also show that Ryukyu Mura presents culture through both tangible and intangible cultural elements. Traditional houses, roofs, pottery, textiles, and household objects represent tangible cultural heritage, while Eisa, traditional music, dance, and other activities represent intangible cultural expressions. The combination of these elements strengthens the representation of Ryukyu Mura as a cultural tourism destination in Okinawa, Japan.

3.5 Cultural Attributes Contributing to the Destination Image of Ryukyu Mura

Table 3. Cultural Attributes Contributing to the Projected Destination Image of Ryukyu Mura

Cultural Attribute	Documentation Evidence	Contribution to Destination Image
Traditional Okinawan architecture	Wooden houses, red-tiled roofs, traditional village arrangement	Represents historical and traditional Okinawan environment
Shisa	Shisa figures around the destination	Represents distinctive Okinawan cultural identity
Traditional performing arts	Eisa, traditional music and dance	Represents living and experiential cultural heritage
Traditional clothing	Clothing worn during cultural performances	Strengthens the visual representation of Okinawan culture
Traditional household spaces	Wooden interiors, tatami, household arrangements	Represents traditional domestic life
Traditional crafts and material culture	Pottery, textiles, and traditional objects	Represents tangible cultural heritage and traditional craftsmanship

Section 3.1 has described what Ryukyu Mura projects as a whole. The remainder of the results section performs a different operation on the same corpus: rather than describing

the projection again, it decomposes it into its constituent attributes and asks, for each one, what its heritage provenance is, by what mode it is mediated to visitors, and which dimension of destination image the corresponding cue is designed to address. The output of Section 3.1 is a thematic description; the output of Section 3.2 is a classification and an explanatory pathway.

The second research question focuses on identifying the cultural attributes that contribute to the destination image of Ryukyu Mura. Based on the observation and photographic documentation, several cultural attributes were identified, including traditional Okinawan architecture, shisa as a cultural symbol, traditional performing arts, traditional clothing, traditional household spaces, and traditional material culture. These attributes collectively contribute to the representation of Ryukyu Mura as a cultural tourism destination.

3.6 Traditional Okinawan Architecture

Traditional Okinawan architecture is one of the most visible cultural attributes contributing to the destination image of Ryukyu Mura. The photographic documentation shows traditional houses with wooden structures and distinctive red-tiled roofs. The arrangement of the buildings also creates the appearance of a traditional Okinawan village.

The architectural characteristics provide visitors with a visual representation of Okinawan cultural heritage. The traditional buildings distinguish Ryukyu Mura from modern tourism facilities and contribute to an image associated with historical Okinawan village life. Therefore, traditional architecture functions as a major cultural attribute in shaping the destination image of Ryukyu Mura.

3.7 Shisa as a Cultural Symbol

Another cultural attribute identified in the documentation is the shisa, which is visible around the entrance and traditional buildings. Shisa is a distinctive cultural symbol associated with Okinawan culture and is commonly found as a decorative and protective figure in Okinawan environments.

The presence of shisa strengthens the cultural identity of the destination because it provides a recognizable visual symbol of Okinawa. In the context of Ryukyu Mura, shisa is not merely a decorative element but also contributes to the representation of local cultural identity. Its presence helps establish an image of the destination that is strongly connected to Okinawan heritage.

3.8 Traditional Performing Arts

Traditional performing arts are another significant cultural attribute found in the documentation. The information displayed at Ryukyu Mura indicates scheduled performances involving Eisa, traditional music, and traditional dance.

The presentation of these activities contributes to the cultural image of the destination by demonstrating that Okinawan culture is represented through live performances.

Eisa and traditional music and dance provide an experiential component that complements the physical cultural environment. Thus, traditional performing arts contribute to the destination image by representing Okinawan culture as something that can be experienced through performance, rather than simply observed through buildings and objects.

3.9 Traditional Clothing

Traditional clothing is also visible in the cultural performance documentation. Performers are presented wearing traditional clothing during cultural activities. The use of traditional clothing contributes to the visual representation of Okinawan cultural identity. Clothing functions as an important cultural attribute because it makes cultural performances visually distinctive and reinforces the connection between the activities and local heritage. In the context of Ryukyu Mura, traditional clothing therefore supports the image of the destination as a place where visitors can encounter visual representations of traditional Okinawan culture.

3.10 Traditional Household Spaces and Objects

The interior documentation provides another cultural attribute through the presentation of traditional household spaces and objects. The photographs show wooden interiors, tatami flooring, pottery, textiles, and other objects associated with traditional domestic environments. These elements contribute to the destination image by presenting aspects of everyday cultural life. Instead of focusing exclusively on formal cultural performances, Ryukyu Mura also represents culture through domestic spaces and household objects. The traditional interior therefore contributes to an image of Ryukyu Mura as a destination where visitors can observe representations of traditional ways of living.

3.11 Traditional Crafts and Material Culture

The documentation also identifies pottery, textiles, and other traditional objects as cultural attributes. These material elements represent traditional craftsmanship and everyday cultural practices. The presence of traditional crafts contributes to the destination image by emphasizing the tangible dimension of Okinawan cultural heritage. Visitors are presented with physical objects that demonstrate aspects of traditional production, design, and lifestyle. Consequently, traditional crafts and material culture complement the architectural and performing arts elements in creating a more comprehensive cultural representation of Ryukyu Mura.

Overall, the findings indicate that the destination image of Ryukyu Mura is supported by a variety of cultural attributes. Traditional architecture and shisa provide strong visual representations of Okinawan identity, while performing arts and traditional clothing provide cultural and experiential representations. Traditional household spaces, pottery, textiles, and other material objects further represent aspects of traditional lifestyle and cultural heritage.

These attributes work together rather than independently. The architectural environment provides the setting, cultural symbols strengthen local identity, performances provide cultural activities, and traditional objects and household spaces represent everyday cultural life. The combination of these attributes contributes to the distinctive destination image of Ryukyu Mura as a cultural tourism destination in Okinawa, Japan.

Table 4. Classification of the observed cultural attributes by heritage provenance and mode of mediation

Cultural attribute	Heritage provenance (evidence available on site)	Dominant mode of mediation	Authenticity reading [25]–[27]	Evidentiary basis in this corpus
Traditional Okinawan architecture (timber structure, red-tiled roofs, stone walls)	Documented Ryukyuan vernacular form; individual buildings presented as relocated historical structures	Reconstructed heritage setting	Objective authenticity of building form, staged in respect of context and use	Photographs of roof form, timber frame, and enclosure; on-site interpretive panels
Village arrangement and circulation route	No documented original settlement plan; layout composed for the attraction	Reconstructed heritage setting (curated composition)	Constructive authenticity — a front region designed to be read as a back region	Route observation, site map, field notes on sightlines and adjacency
Shisa	Continuing Okinawan practice, still in domestic use outside tourism	Cultural symbol	Emergent authenticity; meaning stabilised through repeated public use	Photographs at the entrance and on rooflines; repeated emblematic placement
Eisa, sanshin music, and dance	Community ritual origin associated with Bon observance	Performative representation (within a ticketed programme)	Staged authenticity; compressed, timetabled, and audience-facing	Performance schedule board, observation of designated performance space
Traditional clothing	Historical Ryukyuan dress forms, including bingata textile tradition	Performative representation and, where offered for wear, commodified product	Staged; authenticity negotiated by the visitor rather than intrinsic	Performance photographs; signage for costume-wearing experience
Traditional household spaces and objects (tatami, interiors, utensils)	Domestic material culture of documented type	Reconstructed heritage setting with museal display function	Objective authenticity of objects, recontextualised as walk-through exhibit	Interior photographs; absence of ordinary domestic use observed
Traditional crafts (pottery, textiles)	Living craft traditions transmitted independently of the attraction	Heritage resource and commodified tourism product simultaneously	Emergent authenticity; commodification without necessary loss of meaning	Workshop observation; retail display; participation signage

Table 4 answers the second research question in a way that the thematic description alone could not. Three points follow. First, the attributes are heterogeneous in status: only the craft traditions and Eisa carry provenance that is independent of the attraction, whereas the village layout is a composition with no documented original, and the interiors, though assembled from objects of documented type, are no longer in domestic use. Presenting an element inside a cultural attraction is thus not sufficient to establish its heritage significance, and the criteria in Table 1 make the difference visible rather than assuming it away. Second, the dominant mode of mediation is reconstruction and staging rather than in situ conservation, which is consistent with the site's own self-description as a recreated village and should be stated plainly rather than softened. Third, classification does not imply devaluation: on the constructivist and emergent readings of authenticity [26], [27], a staged or commodified element can still carry and

transmit cultural meaning, and the analytic question is not whether the site is authentic but what kind of representation it constructs and with what resources.

A boundary of this classification should be recorded. Provenance was assessed from on-site interpretation, publicly available site documentation, and the general literature on Ryukyuan material culture, not from building registers, acquisition records, or archival provenance files. Where documentary support was absent, the attribute was assigned to the weaker category under the resolution rule stated in Section 2.5. Archival verification of individual structures and objects would refine the first column of Table 4 and is identified below as a direction for further work.

3.12 Projected Cues and the Three Dimensions of Destination Image

The literature treats destination image as cognitive, affective, and conative [31], [32], [34], and the analysis should state clearly how far the present data can reach across those dimensions. A projected image does not contain perceptions; it contains cues that are addressed to each dimension. The cognitive dimension can be studied comparatively directly here, because the attributes and the explicit knowledge claims made about them are materially present in the site. The affective and conative dimensions can be studied only at the level of the invitation: the site composes an atmosphere and structures a set of possible actions, and these compositional choices are observable, but the emotions and intentions they may produce are not. Table 5 separates the two accordingly, and its final column is a deliberate statement of what this design cannot deliver.

Table 5. Projected cues at Ryukyu Mura and their correspondence with the dimensions of destination image

Destination-image dimension	What the projection supplies	Observable projected cue at Ryukyu Mura	What cannot be established without visitor data
Cognitive	Attribute-level knowledge claims about what the destination is and contains.	Red-tiled roofs and timber structures; shisa; tatami interiors; displayed artefacts; interpretive signage and labels naming periods, materials, and practices.	Whether visitors actually encode these attributes, how accurately, and which of them become salient.
Affective	Invitations to feel — atmosphere cues that propose a mood rather than transmit information.	Enclosed village atmosphere and slow circulation; texture of timber, thatch, and stone; live drumming and sanshin timbre; colour intensity of bingata textiles; the rhythm and volume of Eisa.	The felt emotional response, its valence and intensity, and whether it differs across visitor segments.
Conative	Invitations to act — cues that structure participation and prefigure intention.	Published performance schedules that organise the visit; hands-on craft workshops; costume-wearing offers; retail placement at the route's end; wayfinding that sequences the experience.	Actual behavioural intention, participation take-up, satisfaction, revisit, and recommendation.

Read in this way, the omission of the affective and conative dimensions from the earlier analysis was a consequence of the design rather than an oversight, and the appropriate remedy is not to infer emotions from photographs but to declare the boundary and to specify the study that would cross it. That study is outlined in Section 5.

3.13 Discussion

The findings indicate that the destination image of Ryukyu Mura is strongly constructed through the representation of traditional Okinawan culture. Traditional houses, red-tiled roofs, shisa, cultural performances, traditional clothing, and traditional household objects create a distinctive cultural environment that differentiates Ryukyu Mura from other tourism attractions. This finding supports the concept of destination image as a combination of perceptions and associations related to the physical and cultural characteristics of a destination. In this context, the visual elements observed at Ryukyu Mura communicate an image of Okinawa that is strongly connected to its traditional heritage. The use of traditional architecture and cultural symbols is particularly important because these elements provide visitors with recognizable representations of local identity. Thus, Ryukyu Mura does not simply function as a recreational attraction but also presents cultural resources that contribute to its identity as a cultural tourism destination.

The findings further demonstrate that the destination image of Ryukyu Mura is created through the combination of tangible and intangible cultural attributes. Traditional houses, pottery, textiles, and household spaces represent tangible cultural heritage, while Eisa, traditional music, dance, and cultural activities represent intangible cultural expressions. This combination supports the idea that cultural tourism destinations can provide experiences through both physical heritage and cultural activities. The findings are also consistent with the view that destination image is multidimensional, as visitors may associate a destination with its physical environment, cultural characteristics, and experiential elements. Therefore, the cultural attributes identified in this study collectively strengthen the image of Ryukyu Mura as a destination that showcases and communicates Okinawan cultural heritage. Rather than relying on a single attraction, Ryukyu Mura creates its cultural image through the integration of architecture, symbols, performing arts, and representations of traditional daily life.

3.14 Authenticity, Staging, and the Limits of the Heritage Label

The account above should not be read as a claim that Ryukyu Mura preserves Okinawan heritage in situ. The site is a reconstructed village operated as a commercial attraction, in which buildings have been relocated, interiors composed for viewing, performances timetabled, and craft practices offered as paid participation. In MacCannell's terms the visitor is received in a front region that has been furnished to be read as a back region [25], and the analytic risk is that the resulting legibility is mistaken for provenance. Table 4 was constructed precisely to keep that distinction visible, and it shows that the attributes differ markedly in status: craft traditions and Eisa possess continuity outside the attraction, whereas the village plan is a composition and the interiors are assemblages no longer in domestic use.

Recognising this does not diminish the site's cultural significance, and the paper does not adopt the position that commodification destroys meaning. Cohen's argument that authenticity is emergent, and Wang's distinction between objective, constructive, and existential authenticity [26], [27], both suggest that meaning can be generated

within, rather than despite, a tourism setting: a performance repeated for visitors can still transmit practice to younger performers, and a craft sustained by souvenir demand can still sustain craftspeople. What follows for destination-image research is more specific. If the projected image is assembled largely from reconstructed and performed elements, then its credibility depends less on provenance than on internal consistency and on the visitor's willingness to accept the frame. This reframes the object of analysis: the question is not whether Ryukyu Mura is authentic, but how a reconstruction achieves cultural plausibility — and that is a question about mechanism, addressed next.

3.15 A Proposed Mechanism Linking Cultural Attributes to Destination Image

The findings reported here, and the descriptive character of much of the wider literature, point to a missing middle: studies establish that cultural attributes matter and that destination image forms, but rarely specify the steps in between. Table 6 sets out the mechanism proposed by this study, and marks explicitly which stages the present design can establish and which it cannot.

Table 6. Proposed mechanism linking cultural attributes to destination image

Stage	What happens at this stage	Governing concept	Established by this study?
1. Cultural attributes (resource base)	Tangible and intangible elements of Ryukyuan culture exist as resources: building forms, craft traditions, ritual practices, dress, domestic material culture.	Heritage resource; tangible and intangible cultural heritage [16], [17], [33]	Yes — inventoried and classified in Tables 3 and 4.
2. Curation and staging	The operator selects, relocates, re-constructs, schedules, prices, and sequences those resources, converting them into a visitable assemblage.	Staged authenticity; commodification [25], [26]	Yes, through its observable outcomes — though the operator's decision rules were not accessed.
3. Cultural representation (projected image)	The assemblage stabilises into a coherent and legible proposition: “a traditional Okinawan village”, communicated redundantly across visual, auditory, tactile, and spatial channels.	Projected or induced image [24]	Yes — this is the principal empirical contribution of the study.
4. Visitor interpretation	Visitors decode the cues against prior knowledge, motives, cultural distance, and expectations, and negotiate for themselves whether the representation is credible.	Constructive and existential authenticity; image formation [27], [31]	No — requires visitor data; the principal limitation of this study.
5. Destination image (perceived)	A cognitive, affective, and conative structure forms, positioning the site relative to competing attractions and feeding revisit and recommendation intentions.	Perceived destination image [19], [21], [32], [34]	No — requires visitor data; specified as the second phase in Section 5.
Feedback loop	The perceived image informs marketing, programming, and subsequent re-curation, so that stages 5 and 2 are connected over time.	Image management; destination positioning	Not tested; proposed for longitudinal work.

The mechanism also requires an account of how attributes interact, since the finding that they “work together” is otherwise merely asserted. Four interaction principles are proposed, each grounded in the observed material. Redundancy: the same cultural proposition is restated across independent sensory channels — seen in the roofs, heard in the *sanshin*, touched in the clay, walked through in the village plan — so that no single element has to carry the claim alone and inconsistencies in any one of them are absorbed rather than exposed. Complementarity: static attributes supply the setting while performative attributes supply the event, and neither alone produces immersion, since architecture without activity reads as a museum and performance without setting reads as a show. Symbolic condensation: one or two highly recognisable markers, here the *shisa* and the red-tiled roof, compress the whole assemblage into a portable sign that can travel in photographs and word of mouth, which is the route by which a projected image circulates beyond the site. Participation: hands-on workshops and costume wearing convert observation into embodied action, and this is the most plausible pathway from the cognitive dimension towards the affective and conative dimensions, because it gives the visitor a personal stake in the representation.

Stated as a proposition for testing: the distinctiveness of a reconstructed cultural destination’s image is a function not of the number of heritage attributes it presents but of the redundancy, complementarity, symbolic condensation, and participatory depth with which those attributes are composed. This proposition is derived from, not confirmed by, the present data, and Section 5 specifies how it could be tested.

3.16 Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, the study contributes in three ways rather than by restating the established link between culture and image. It separates the projected from the perceived image and demonstrates what can and cannot be claimed from supply-side evidence alone; it supplies transferable criteria for classifying the contents of curated cultural attractions, which addresses the tendency to apply the heritage label indiscriminately; and it articulates a staged mechanism with four interaction principles that converts a descriptive association into a testable pathway. Practically, the analysis suggests that managers of reconstructed cultural attractions should attend to the consistency and complementarity of their attribute mix rather than to its size, should be transparent in interpretation about what is original and what is reconstructed — since disclosed reconstruction is more defensible than undisclosed ambiguity — and should treat participatory formats as the principal lever available for moving visitors beyond recognition towards attachment.

3.17 Limitations and Future Research

Four limitations bound these conclusions. First and most importantly, no tourists were interviewed or surveyed, so the study establishes what is projected and not what is perceived; no claim is made about tourists’ cognitive, affective, or conative destination image, and the mechanism in Table 6 is a proposal rather than a tested model. Second, the corpus derives from a single visit by a single observer and therefore records the site

as encountered on that occasion, excluding seasonal programming and areas off the public route. Third, provenance was assessed from on-site interpretation and published literature rather than from archival or registry sources, which limits the precision of the heritage-provenance column in Table 4. Fourth, the authors' position as non-Japanese-speaking international visitors gives good access to what the site projects to a foreign audience but restricted access to meanings legible only to local visitors.

Four lines of further work follow directly. A visitor study combining on-site surveys with post-visit interviews would allow the cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions to be measured and the correspondence in Table 5 to be tested, ideally comparing what the site projects with what visitors recall unprompted. A comparative design across two or more Okinawan cultural attractions, or across cultural villages in different countries, would establish whether the four interaction principles hold beyond this case. Interviews with operators, performers, and craftspeople would open stage 2 of the mechanism, which the present design can see only through its outcomes, and would allow the curation rationale to be analysed directly. Finally, analysis of visitor-generated content would show which condensed symbols actually circulate beyond the site, providing an independent test of the symbolic condensation principle.

4 Conclusion

This study analysed the projected destination image of Ryukyu Mura through the cultural attributes it presents to visitors. Three themes structure that projection: traditional architecture and village environment, cultural performances and activities, and traditional lifestyle and material culture. Disaggregating those themes against explicit criteria showed that the attributes are heterogeneous in heritage status and are mediated principally through reconstruction, symbolic display, performance, and commodification rather than through in situ conservation. On this basis the paper proposed a five-stage mechanism connecting cultural attributes to destination image, together with four principles — redundancy, complementarity, symbolic condensation, and participation — that describe how the attributes act in combination. The conclusion is therefore specific rather than general: Ryukyu Mura constructs a coherent and distinctive cultural proposition whose force derives from the composition of its attributes rather than from the documented provenance of each, and whose translation into a perceived destination image remains a hypothesis awaiting visitor evidence.

5 DECLARATIONS

5.1 Author Contributions

Conceptualization, Samsiah Hardianto and Shella Gherina Saptiany; Methodology, Samsiah Hardianto and Shella Gherina Saptiany; Investigation, Samsiah Hardianto and Shella Gherina Saptiany; Data curation, Samsiah Hardianto and Shella Gherina Saptiany; Formal analysis, Samsiah Hardianto and Shella Gherina Saptiany; Validation, Samsiah Hardianto and Shella Gherina Saptiany; Writing – original draft preparation,

Samsiah Hardianto; Writing – review and editing, Shella Gherina Saptiany. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

5.2 Funding

The authors received no specific funding for this research.

5.3 Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.

5.4 Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

5.5 Artificial Intelligence (AI) Disclosure

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used AI-assisted technology solely to paraphrase sentences and improve wording. AI was not used to generate research data, conduct the analysis, produce findings, or replace the authors' substantive scholarly judgment. The authors reviewed and revised the manuscript and take full responsibility for its accuracy, originality, integrity, and final content.

5.6 Research Ethics

Ethical review and approval were not required for this study because it used non-participant observation and photographic documentation of publicly displayed cultural attributes at a tourism attraction, did not involve interviews or intervention, and excluded identifiable visitor images.

5.7 Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

5.8 Acknowledgments

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